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REPORT

OF THE

SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF ROXBURY.

MARCH 18, 1839.

Contra

By the Revised Statutes of the State of Massachusetts it is made the duty of School Committees to make, annually, a detailed report of the condition of the several public schools in their respective towns, designating particular improvements and defects in the methods or means of education, and to state such facts and suggestions relative thereto as in their opinion will best promote the interest and increase the usefulness of said schools.

In compliance with this requisition, the School Committee of Roxbury ask leave to offer to their fellow citizens the following report.

In the course of their examination of the public schools they have found much to commend; they

have found many instances of faithfulness on the part of the teachers, and of successful results in the instruction of their pupils;...they have also found defects in the management of some of the schools, the correction of which has received their prompt attention.

In the boys' apartment of the Town-hall school, which claimed to be a literary institution of the highest rank under the town government, a claim which could not be admitted without a feeling of mortification, so general a deficiency of the characteristics of a good school was apparent, that the committee were unanimously in favor of an immediate and complete change in its organization.

How was this to be effected?

The result of an earnest and patient consideration of this question was,

1st. To unite this school and the adjoining one for girls under the same government, allowing to each sex its distinct apartment.

2d. To give the charge of both to one master, with three female assistants.

In the selection of instructors, subsequently made for this purpose, your committee believed themselves fortunate in obtaining those whose qualifications were entitled to the highest confidence.

From the time of completing these arrangements to the present, a period of more than four months, there has been a gradual improvement in the discipline of this institution and the attendance of its pupils, which cannot fail to be gratifying to all who are interested in the advancement of our common schools. Already every seat in the boys' apartment is filled, and we are obliged to exclude applicants for want of room. In a few weeks, there is abundant reason to believe that a similar state of things will be found in the girls' apartment. A special appropriation for a new school-house will therefore be necessary, which we confidently hope will be freely granted.

At the commencement of the year the grammar school in the westerly parish was found to be without a teacher, and the vacancy was satisfactorily supplied without delay. This institution has been singularly unfortunate by its frequent changes of instructors, having had four within three years. The committee have reason to believe that the present incumbent, who is the second of their own appointment, will fully satisfy the expectations of the inhabitants of that district.

Of the Eliot school on Jamaica Plains, which is but partially under the supervision of the town, the building having been erected and the teacher paid chiefly by the trustees of a donation for this purpose,

your committee have formed a favorable opinion. The pupils appear to be happily and profitably employed, and their progress is consequently encouraging : the daily attendance is less regular than could be desired, but, as this is a fault of common occurrence in our public schools, and almost invariably to be laid to the charge of the parents and not of the teachers, the committee can only leave it where it belongs with an earnest wish for its correction.

In the primary schools, some changes have occurred affecting their interests. During the winter months a master has taken charge of No. 5, near Jamaica Plains, whose popularity is made evident by the crowded state of the school.

No. 9 in the upper section of the town, and No. 10 in East Canterbury, have been united during the winter season under an efficient teacher.

Of the primary schools as a class we can speak in terms of approbation ;—many of them are excellent, and their teachers deserve much higher compensation than they have yet received ; in a few others, defects are apparent, the correction of which will demand the vigilant attention of our successors in office.

The number of pupils, attending each of the public schools, is as follows :

Town-Hall school, boy's apartment	142
" " girl's " 	126
Westerly grammar school	60
Eliot " " 	60
Primary school, No. 1	51
" " 2	40
" " 3	72
" " 4	61
" " 5	60
" " 6	22
" " 7	14
" " 8	29
" " 9 and 10	28
" " 11	36
" " 12	40
" " 13	56

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During the past year it was found necessary to make some repairs and to furnish apparatus for the public schools, the cost of which has exceeded the appropriation for such purposes to the amount of \$350. As this sum remains unpaid and will require a special appropriation, it may be well to state that the debt was incurred for placing outside blinds to the Town-hall school, fitting backs to the seats, painting, and some smaller repairs upon the same; providing additional blinds for primary school No. 3, and clocks for such places as needed them most.

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Something may be profitably said at this time respecting the buildings, which have been erected in Roxbury for the accommodation of our children.

With the exception of the Eliot school-house on Jamaica Plains, the grammar school-house in the westerly parish, the primary school-houses No. 10 in East Canterbury, No. 13 on Tremont-street, and No. 3 on Centre-street, there is not a building owned by the town and devoted to education which does not exhibit many a violation of the rules of school-house architecture.

Some are advantageously situated ; but the probability of an increase in the population of the district, where they are located, seems to have been entirely lost sight of ; so that, if the number of pupils who apply for admission should not exceed fifteen, they will fully answer their destination ; but should fifty or sixty claim admittance, a case not without precedent, it would be difficult to say how they could be accommodated.

Instances of this short-sightedness may be found in Primary schools No. 11 on the Mill-dam, and No. 12 at the Point.

The rooms over the Town-hall are capacious, but the neighborhood is unfavorable to literary exertion. A school should never be placed by the boundary of a public and much frequented road, where the persons of the children when out may be endan-

gered by the travel, and their attention when in, called off by the noise of the vehicles and passers by.

When we consider in addition to this, that the Town-hall school is directly over the place of popular meetings and public assemblies of other kinds, the noise attendant on which often renders necessary a summary abandonment of the school exercises, we are ready to believe that a more fitting appropriation than the present one might be made of the upper story of that building.

Proper modes of ventilation are found in very few of our school houses. It seems generally to have been forgotten that a room, designed to accommodate from fifty to one hundred persons, should be differently constructed from one intended for a common family of eight or ten only.

There is no such indispensable necessary to life as fresh air. A child may live for days without food, drink, or sleep; but deprive him of air for only one minute, and all power of thought is extinct—he becomes as incapable of any intellectual operation as one of the dead, and in a few minutes more you may vainly try to restore him to animation.

In the Black-hole of Calcutta, in the year 1756, one hundred and forty-six persons were confined to a room only eighteen feet square, for ten hours; and, although there was one aperture for the admission of air and light, one hundred and twenty-three

had perished at the end of that time. Only twenty-three survived, and several of these were immediately seized with the typhus fever.

In the Dublin hospital, during the four years preceding 1785, out of 7550 children, 2944 died within a fortnight after their birth ; that is, 38 out of every 100. By causing fresh air to be introduced by means of pipes, the number of deaths during the three following years was reduced to 165 out of 4243, or less than 4 in 100.

In the state prison at Charlestown $171\frac{1}{2}$ cubic feet are allowed to each prisoner's cell. In addition to this, the air has free passage by means of flues in the walls. In the penitentiary at Philadelphia 1300 cubic feet are allowed to every prisoner, solitarily confined—while in some of our school-houses less than 40 cubic feet are allowed to a scholar, without any proper means of ventilation. A culpable instance of this may be seen in No. 5, near Jamaica Plains ; the room occupied by the pupils, nearly 60 in number, of various ages from 4 to 18, is 25 feet long, 24 feet broad, and 8 feet high ; the windows are small, and, lest any refreshing breezes should be received by the occasional opening of the door, an outhouse, sending forth any thing but aromatic perfumes, has been placed at the very entrance. It is believed that the civic committee who superintended the erection of this nuisance, had never heard of read of the black hole of Calcutta.

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Primary schools No. 1 and 2 in Sumner-street are badly situated ; they are both in the same building, surrounded and hemmed in by houses, many of whose occupants regard not cleanliness among the christian virtues : the upper room is the best, as it has the most light, and is the most capacious ; the one below deserves not the name of a school room ; the interest of pupils and instructers demands a removal to a healthier situation.

Having thus spoken of the defects in the architecture of our school-houses, we cannot close the subject without recommending to those who may hereafter be called upon to erect new ones, an adoption of the excellent plan described in a report made to the Board of Education by their Secretary in 1838. If with this light before our eyes, we again fall into error the greater will be our condemnation.

Your committee have thus endeavored to give some account of the condition of the public schools. They now ask of their fellow citizens a serious and candid consideration of the following questions.

Why is it that the town of Roxbury, which has made so respectable advances in husbandry, manufactures and mechanic arts, is reproached for the character of its public schools ?

Why do so many of her inhabitants send their children to the private seminaries of the adjoining city or elsewhere ?

Why do we hear it so often said by citizens of Boston, ‘ We admire your village, its romantic heights and beautiful valleys ; we would gladly live with you, were it not for the character of your public schools’ ?

Knowing as we do that the charges implied in these questions are founded in truth, it will be profitable to ascertain the causes which have contributed to bring them upon us.

Among the most prominent is undoubtedly the inadequate compensation which the instructors have received at our hands for their services. Two years ago the highest salary of the highest teacher in our highest school was but five hundred dollars ; a sum far lower than is paid to an usher in yonder city.

About the same time, the teachers of our primary schools, many of whom had from fifty to sixty pupils, received but one hundred and fifty dollars per annum, a sum less, if we consider board of any worth, than is paid to the female domestics who labour in our families.

Perhaps it may be supposed that there were frequent vacations which lightened the labor of these devoted guides of our children ? Alas, no ; those terms of relaxation, so beneficial to the teacher as well as the taught, were as infrequent as angels’ visits. In some instances a year has been suffered

to elapse before their cheering influence has been felt.

How long so miserable a pecuniary pittance would have been measured out, had not attention been called to the subject in public town meeting by a respectful petition from the teachers, we cannot say. The indignation expressed by many citizens on hearing the facts stated in that petition, and the immediate appropriation of an additional sum to raise these salaries, were good evidence that if public justice had slumbered, it was not extinct among us.

A necessary consequence of inadequate salaries for our teachers is the frequent loss of the most efficient among them by the offer of better compensation in other places. Large drafts have been made upon us in this way by the city of Boston, and we must expect to lose the few we have left, if the appropriation this day asked for be not granted.

Let us compare for a moment the annual expense of our school system with that of Boston.

With a population of 7493, the largest sum we have ever appropriated to the support of our schools, is \$5000, or about 66 cents for each inhabitant.

Boston with a population of 80,325, appropriates the liberal sum of \$107,500 per annum, or about 1,33 cts. for each inhabitant. She gives a salary of \$2400 to the teachers of her high schools, \$1500 to those of her grammar and \$250 to those of her primary schools.

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A single school in the city costs more than the whole appropriation of the town of Roxbury.

Can any good reason be assigned for such a difference in the expenses of education in the two places?

Do the children of Boston deserve better instruction than our own? We should hold that citizen dishonored who should advance such an opinion.

Do the instructors of the city labor more devotedly, or have shorter periods of vacation than our own? It is well known that they do not; and, as a natural consequence, they do not require higher salaries to enable them to retire sooner from the labor of instruction.

Does it necessarily cost them more to support their families than our own teachers are obliged to pay? We admit this to be the case to some extent; but far from justifying the existing differences in the salaries. If it costs a man \$16 per week to support his family in the city and \$14 in the country, is that a sufficient reason for giving one a salary of \$2400 and the other a salary of 500 or 600 \$?

Perhaps some of our citizens may think a comparison, between such places as Roxbury and Boston, an unfair one: yet we do not see why it is, if we keep in view the proportion of numbers.

To satisfy them we will glance at some other neighboring towns to see how we stand, in comparison with them in our liberality to the public schools. Let it be understood that our statistics are gathered from the "Abstract of the Massachusetts School Returns,"

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made to the Board of Education, in the year 1838.

Dorchester, with a population of 4564, raises a tax of \$4650.

Dedham,	"	"	3532,	"	3000.
Chelsea,	"	"	1659,	"	1700.
Brookline,	"	"	1083,	"	1050.
Brighton,	"	"	1337,	"	1000.
Charlestown,	"	"	10,101,	"	12,600.
Milton,	"	"	1772,	"	1600.

In each of the above towns we see that at least 25 per cent more is raised, in proportion to the inhabitants, than in the town of Roxbury. Alas, for comparisons; the farther we go into them, the lower shall we hang our heads!

Another cause of depreciation in the character of our schools, may be found in the want of sympathy between the parents and instructors. Mutual intercourse should be more frequent. We are too apt to forget, that, if the teachers have high duties to discharge towards us and our children, we also have duties towards them of no less importance, though too often lost sight of.

Parents should visit the schools where their children attend; should listen to the plans of the teacher, and, if they are not manifestly wrong, should aid him in the execution of them; should see that their children go decently clothed and cleanly in their

persons ; should not detain them at home for trifling causes, and should promptly supply the required books and apparatus. Strange it is that duties so plain and reasonable should be daily neglected.

Much more might be said without exhausting this subject; but we trust that by drawing public attention to it, we shall sufficiently accomplish the object we have had in view.

In conclusion the committee recommend to their fellow citizens the appropriation of \$5645 for the support of the public schools, during the coming year. They also recommend the appropriation of \$100, for the payment of the school committee for their services, according to the laws of this commonwealth ; and \$355 for necessary repairs, to be made under their direction upon the school houses of Roxbury.

They also recommend the appointment of a committee, to consider and report at the adjourned meeting in April, upon the expediency of erecting a building in the neighborhood of the town-hall, capable of accommodating two schools ; a suitable location for it, and an estimate of its probable cost.

All which is respectfully submitted, by

CHARLES K. DILLAWAY,

Chairman of the School Committee.

At a meeting of the citizens of Roxbury, held at the town-hall, on Monday the 18th of March, 1839, the above report was offered, accepted, and ordered to be printed, for distribution among the inhabitants of the town.

The appropriations recommended in the report were granted, and the following gentlemen were appointed a committee upon the subject of a new school house :—

P. G. ROBBINS,
CALEB PARKER, JR.
SAMUEL GUILD,
DAVID A. SIMMONS,
CHARLES K. DILLAWAY,
E. W. STONE,
WM. H. SPEAR.

It was then voted that the same committee be requested to consider and report what measures are expedient or necessary to be taken for the establishment of a High School, to meet the requisitions of the law and the wants of the inhabitants of Roxbury.



31.1905

